Literacy Tips Week 7, Term 3, 2006: Feature Analysis

Have you ever created a grid or matrix for your students in order to help them compare information? If so, you have been using a vocabulary/comprehension strategy called Semantic-Feature Analysis. Here is a definition of the strategy:

"Semantic-Feature Analysis (Anders & Bos, 1986) is a strategy that helps reinforce vocabulary that is essential to understanding important concepts in a text. The teacher builds a grid in which essential vocabulary words are listed vertically and features and/ or ideas are listed horizontally. Students complete the grid by indicating with a plus (+) or minus (-) sign whether each word possesses the stated features or is related to the ideas."
Anders, P.L., & Bos, C.S. (1986). Semantic feature analysis: An interactive strategy for vocabulary development and text comprehension. Journal of Reading, 29(7), 610-616.

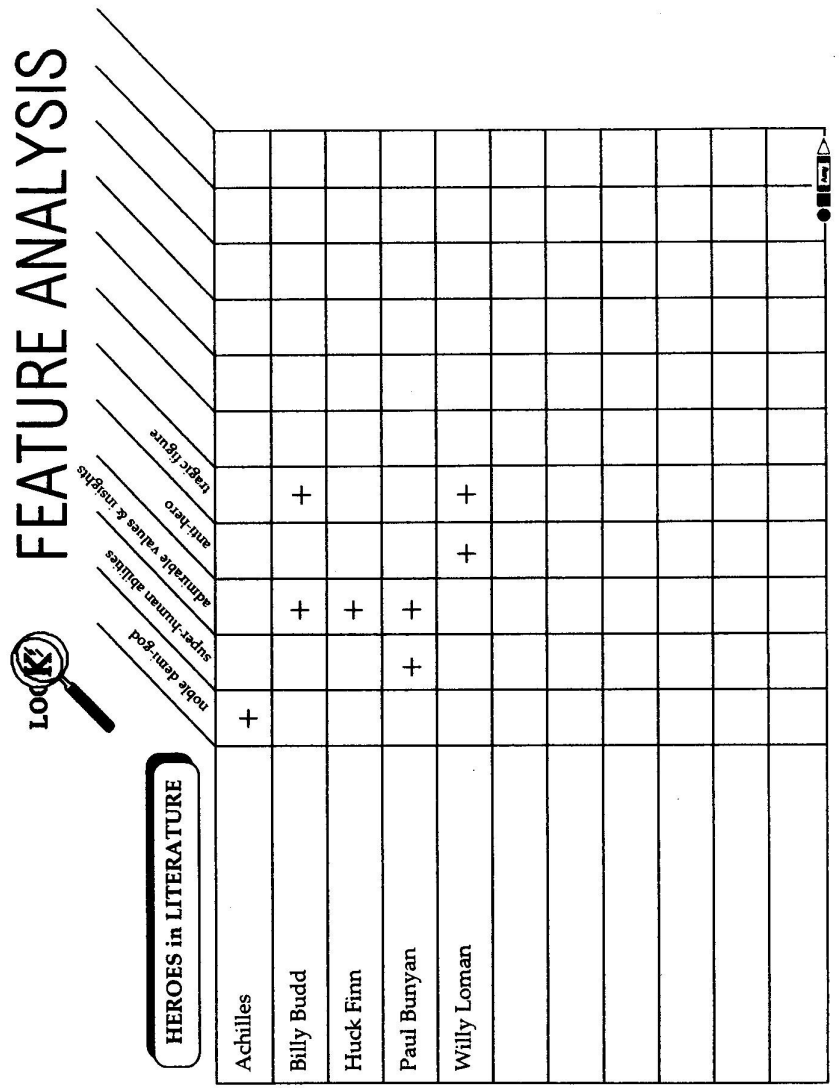
It sounds a lot more complicated than it really is. I like this strategy because it quickly gets students thinking about the features of new concepts. Because students only have to code their thinking using + and - signs, it motivates students who are resistant to writing out their thoughts. Visually organizing data ultimately aids students when it does come to putting their thoughts down in writing.

A language arts application of this strategy follows. Ask students to list the heroes in literature you have been studying on the left- hand side of the paper. Across the top of the matrix, list characteristics of heroes. Then ask students to analyze each hero listed to determine whether they think he/she demonstrates those particular qualities.

In the boxes they use + and - signs to code whether the features surface. Students sometimes use a combination +/- sign, which stimulates discussion when they are asked to justify their response. You can also ask them to place a numeric code next to each version they read indicating the kind of reading they used (#1 skimming, #2 read quickly, #3 read thoroughly). This allows students flexibility as they read the various versions. Hopefully your students will get intrigued comparing and contrasting versions. Here is a web-site that has links to many different approaches to using Cinderella in the classroom. This website has some great ideas for comparing different versions of the Cinderella story.
www.webenglishteacher.com/cinderella.html

Of course, this strategy works across all of the content areas. Attached are examples from Maths and Science. The Internet link explains how the feature analysis can be used in social studies.
http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readqu
est/strat/sfa.html

PTO



FEATURE ANALYSIS

POLYGONS	opposite sides parallel	equilateral	equiangular	4-sided	3-sided						
square	+	+	+	+							
rectangle	+		+	+							
triangle					+						
rhombus	+	+		+							
trapezoid				+							

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